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BAYS PRECINCT COMMUNITY CONSULTATION: ANOTHER FAILURE?

The Glebe Society entered into the Bays Precinct process in the hope that something positive could be achieved, notwithstanding the sorry recent planning history in the Precinct. Years of community calls for an input into an integrated and strategic planning process for the Bays Precinct was at last on the Government's agenda. However, after only two meetings, the viability of the long awaited community reference group hangs in the balance.

The first meeting left many participants doubtful as to whether the process was serious and whether it had any possibility of influencing the planning outcomes.

There was much unease about the meeting procedures, most notably: no minutes; no opportunity for discussion -as distinct from merely listing - of issues, and no voting on resolutions. The announcement that the group would meet 4-6 times seemed to impose an unrealistic timeframe to develop a considered and debated position. The Community Reference Group was to have no direct link with the Bays Precinct Task Force, the site for any real planning exercise and comprised exclusively of government agencies.

But all groups decided to stick with the process.

One week after the first meeting, Minister Tripodi announced that the Government had made a decision on the development of a part of Blackwattle Bay and the preferred lessee. Like others, we expressed our puzzlement at the timing of this announcement, given a new consultation process, announced with great fanfare by the Government, had just begun - and Blackwattle Bay is definitely in the Bays Precinct.

The Government's response was to redefine the terms of reference: The 'Bays Precinct' really meant some bits of it: White Bay, White Bay Power Station and Glebe Island! It seems what we had been taking at face value as the ambit of our role was just rhetoric.

The events of the last two weeks have left us disappointed and frustrated. Yet again the NSW Government seems unable to manage an opportunity for intelligent and integrated planning.

The Glebe Society has not yet abandoned the process. It is too important a site not to try again.

We have written to the Minister for Planning asking her to accept a request from the Reference Group to attend the next meeting and to reaffirm that the terms of reference mean what they say. We have also

asked her to create a direct link between the Community Reference Group and the Task Force to rebuild trust and allow some transparency so we can be assured that our input is given reasonable consideration.

We are hopeful that a meaningful consultation and planning process can yet be retrieved from this sorry mess.

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President
The Glebe Society Inc

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17 August 2008

The terms of reference as issued to the Community Reference Group

- Provide advice about community aspirations and needs in relation to the Bays Precinct that will inform future planning processes.
- Advise on current and emerging issues of interest and concern to the community and various stakeholders.
- Encourage and inform community discussion by conveying information on the Bays Precinct to community and stakeholder networks.
- Provide input to matters considered by the NSW Government's Bays Precinct Taskforce in preparing for the first phase of strategic planning for the future of the Precinct.

We thought they were pretty clear as to ambit of the area under consideration. And we were issued with a helpful map showing exactly what is covered in the Precinct!